

Where the Money Goes: Study Abroad Finances by the Mexico-US Solidarity Network

To our knowledge the Mexico Solidarity Network is the only organization in the US, and possibly the world, to combine community organizing work with a study abroad program.

We do this for several reasons. We are trying to implement a theoretical proposition that radical social change can be more effective by building cross-class alliances, in this case including the immigrant community in the US, organized social movements in Mexico, and university students. Each group has something important to offer to social change. Immigrants and Mexican social movements bring their real life experiences while university students bring cultural knowledge and social connections that can translate into effective organizing in the US context. In addition, university students have access to resources (either actual, through social links, or potential because of university education) that immigrant communities and Mexican social movements generally can't access. We are committed to building community in Albany Park, Chicago, to building social movements in Mexico, and to developing organizers for social change on campuses and in home towns with the help of lessons learned from Mexico's most important social movements. In this respect there is a natural connection between community work and study abroad.

This innovative model provides important resources for Mexican social movements and community organizing with Latino immigrants in Chicago, and frees us from the time constraints of constantly searching for and the political constraints of being beholden to foundation funding.

In an effort to fully inform our students and partners regarding finances, we offer the following summary:

The Mexico Solidarity Network offers the following study abroad programs in Mexico:

Spring (\$9,000) – 14 week, 16 credit program in Chiapas, Tlaxcala and Mexico City
Spring (\$9,000) – 15 week, 16 credit research program in Chiapas, Tlaxcala or Mexico City
Summer (\$2,800) – 4 week, 5 credit program in Chiapas
Summer (\$2,800) – 4 week, 5 credit program in Tlaxcala and Mexico City
Fall (\$9,000) – 14 week, 16 credit program in Chiapas, Tlaxcala and Mexico City
Fall (\$9,000) – 15 week, 16 credit research program in Chiapas, Tlaxcala or Mexico City
Year round (variable costs depending on program) – Special programs varying from one to 15 weeks designed to meet the needs of partner universities and professors

*From September, 2005 until December, 2010, we charged \$8,500 for a 14-week, 16-credit semester. We will raise our tuition in January, 2011, to meet increasing costs and decreasing sources of funding that used to support our programs.

Our partners in Mexico include:

Centro de Español y Lenguas Mayas Rebelde Autónomo Zapatista in Chiapas
Consejo Nacional Urbano y Campesino in Tlaxcala
Frente Popular Francisco Villa Independiente in Mexico City

The money we receive from study abroad tuition is spent as follows:

Partners and expenses in Mexico	40%
Travel	3%
Professors	21%
Administration	10%
Albany Park Autonomous Center	26%

Our professors earn the following annual salaries:

Dr. Thomas Hansen	\$22,500
Dr. Gloria Benavides	\$22,500
Prof. Stuart Schussler	\$30,000
Prof. Tony Nelson	\$30,000

About a quarter of our study abroad income supports the Albany Park Autonomous Center, an immigrant community center located on the north side of Chicago. The Center offers a free bilingual adult high school and classes in ESL, computers and alternative medicine. Two immigrant women's cooperatives are housed in the Center – a cleaning cooperative and a cooking cooperative. The study abroad program provides more than 80% of the income for operating the Center. About 40% of our study abroad income supports our social movement partners in Mexico.

The cost of our study abroad programs is comparable to or less than most public universities in the US and is substantially less than most private institutions. For example, the University of Illinois charges \$6,829 per semester, not including food and lodging (which is included in our program costs), while Pomona College (a private institution) charges \$19,197 per semester without food or lodging.

For an interesting overview of how higher education is charging and spending, see Hacker and Dreifus, "[Colleges: Where the money goes](#)," Los Angeles Times, September 12, 2010.